

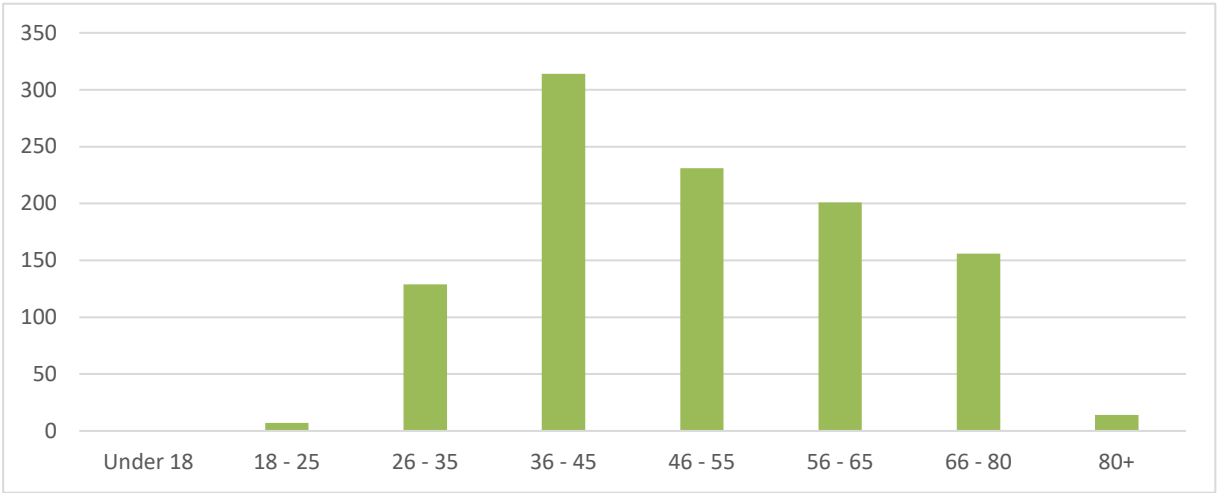
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Visual Preference Survey Summary

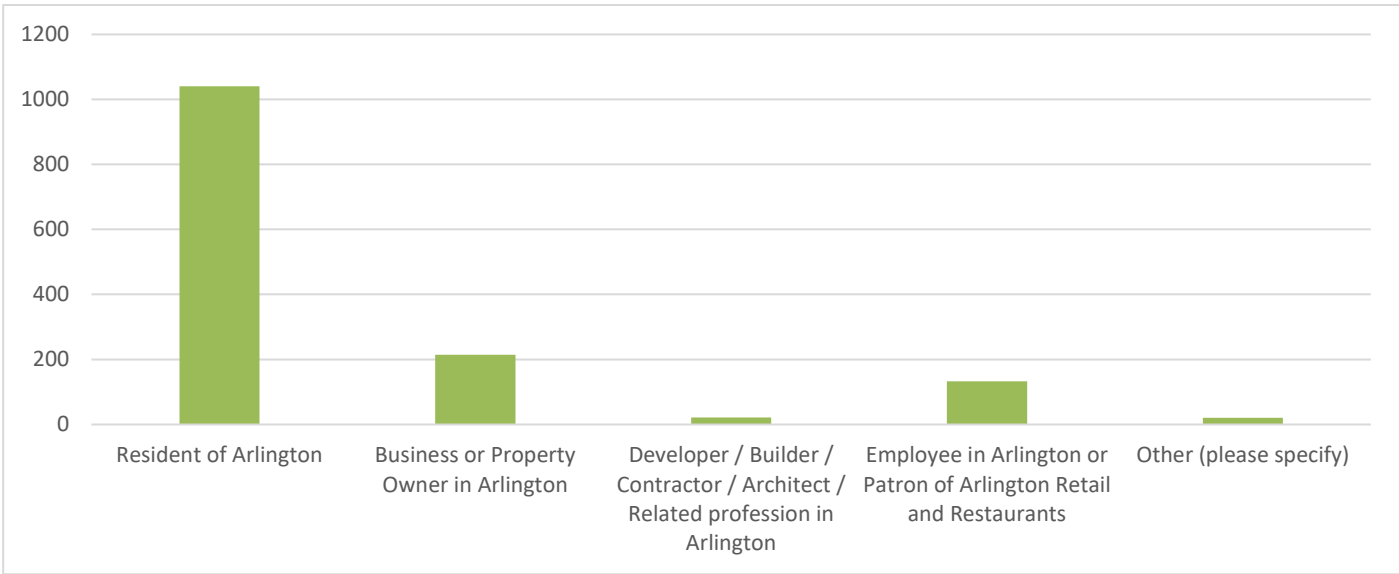
May 2020

A total of 1,071 responses were received. The survey was open from May 6, 2020 to June 8, 2020.

1. Please select your age group:



2. Please select your association(s) with the Town of Arlington:



3. What do you like about Arlington's residential neighborhoods?

Emergent themes from the 884 responses include:

- Walkable, friendly neighborhoods that are convenient to many amenities and good for families.
- Balance between density and quietness.
- Variety of neighborhoods and architectural character that reflect Arlington's history.
- Green spaces, yards, and trees.

Example quotes have been compiled to illustrate a variety of viewpoints:

- *"Walkability. Even the densest sections of East Arlington maintain a feeling of openness that you simply do not get if you walk through Somerville or Cambridge. This is what I like most about Arlington-- a happy medium between the dense city and the suburban Lexington."*
- *"They are walkable and family oriented. I like that they have unique character, such as stained glass in East Arlington. Those that have green space for gardens or play areas are also nice."*
- *"The walkability, how neighbors in my neighborhood often hang out in their front yards and porches, the tree canopy, the variety of*

different commercial sense community city great diverse beautiful Sidewalks trees
neighbors everything Lots trees Varied architecture housing styles interesting
historic density Mature trees older walk around gardens historic homes small
neighborly proximity families many mostly lots especially walking
enough character design parks attractive variety live
buildings community feel Walkability space houses
Quiet makes streets schools homes greenery
neighborhoods still houses scale trees
neighborhood feel feel close walkable charm mix Also
space porches yards dense people trees sidewalks
sidewalks love green space businesses friendly clean
Arlington trees green space town allow nice pleasant older homes
pretty community see good unique look properties diversity style homes safe
nature style plants areas front yards generally Relatively Size Heights Tree lined streets
East Arlington

Word cloud generated based on frequency of different words.

- housing styles especially older homes."*
- *"Charm of the historic homes, small but attractive yards/ gardens, walkability to parks and businesses."*
- *"They are quiet, but access to shops and transportation is nearby."*
- *"The feeling of community and quiet neighborhoods, safe for raising children and forming*
- lifelong connections with other families."*
- *"I like the different characteristics that define the many different neighborhoods in Arlington. I like the bungalows and the clear history that similar style houses were built around the same time. I like that there's a mix of large and small houses, apartment buildings and 2 and 3 family houses."*

4. What are your thoughts on more recently built or renovated houses (from 2000 to today) in Arlington's residential neighborhoods?

Emergent themes from the 904 responses include:

- Inappropriate scale of many of the new houses relative to parcel and surrounding neighborhood context.
- Many new houses feel generic, boxy, oversized, and priced higher.
- Sensitive renovations were preferred.
- A sizable minority felt neutral or positive towards recent constructions.

Example quotes have been compiled to illustrate a variety of viewpoints:

- *"Some are well designed, fit well with the neighborhood, respect neighbors rights and property, and are improvements to the neighborhood. However, a substantial number are completely out-of-place/character with respect to scale and massing, intrude significantly on neighbor's property with respect to loss of sunlight (shading), loss of privacy, and loss of sightlines/visual impairment..."*
- *"Too big and too expensive."*
- *"Most are pretty plain (nice word for ugly) and similar in design."*

McMansions bad feel oversized fit smaller houses renovated new builds generally character neighborhood huge construction developers dislike new love living lack one really style maximize use enough also small lots think fit neighborhood good allowed character OK see houses built space hate much boxes Arlington less design part lot scale big generic homes cookie cutter look modern houses need neighborhood others building mostly many especially large structures seem neighbors ugly way town families renovations trees new houses green space nice torn well single family homes often destroy fine area size little make expensive new construction duplexes garages condo people don't yard change large lots interesting big lots want place possible architecture awful street great

Word cloud generated based on frequency of different words.

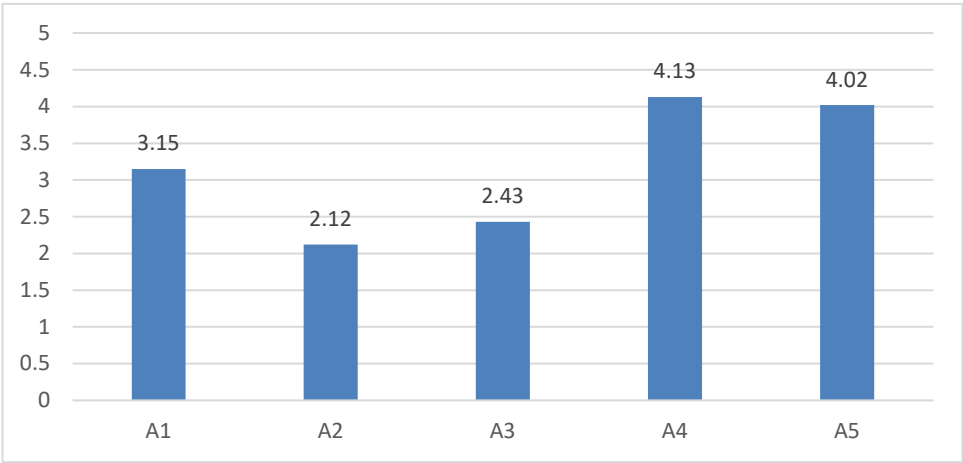
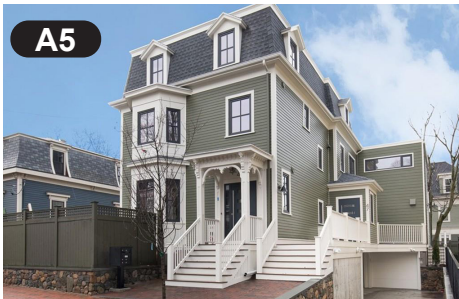
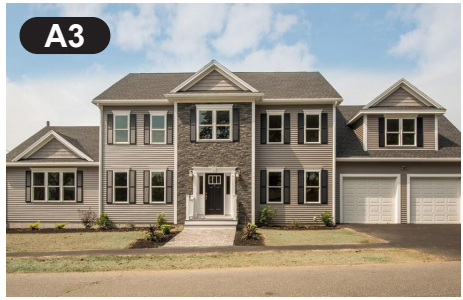
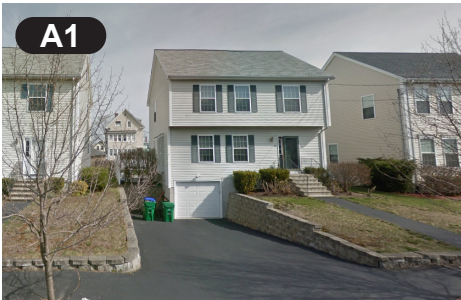
- *"Houses should not occupy 100% of the lots they are built on. Most new houses are far too large."*
- *"I am concerned about the size of the homes and the lack of yard space."*
- *"Renovations are usually attractive, but new construction is often bland and lacks character compared to older houses."*
- *"A few new homes are a good fit in the neighborhood, but most are*

generic "Home Depot boxes" built to the limit of the setbacks and height restrictions. Renovations are mostly sympathetic to the existing home, but some are unsuccessful attempts at dramatic style transformation and others are simply inappropriate changes to the structure that look awful."

- *"I think they add to a sense of modernization. Many of the houses they replace are run-down, small, and out of date."*

Single-Family House (A1 - A5) - Preference Results

Survey participants ranked images of single-family houses from Highly Undesirable (1), Undesirable (2), Neutral (3), Desirable (4), and Highly Desirable (5). A rating for each image was calculated and is displayed in the following graph.



414 respondents shared additional thoughts about single-family houses in Arlington and some of the reasoning for their ranking.

Emergent themes from the responses include:

- Respondents noted that many of the examples were bland in design (A1, A2) or too large and suburban (A3).
- The other two examples (A4, A5) were rated higher for their smaller scale and detailing.
- Concerns about how houses are maximizing lot coverage and lack architectural details such as porches that reflect their context and create a welcoming street presence

Example quotes have been compiled to illustrate a variety of viewpoints:

- *"Some are just boring. I like porches to help house relate to street. Don't love highly visible garage doors. Not sure my or my neighbors opinion should have sway in what private parties build. The more we regulate housing, the less we get of it."*
- *"I like front porches, gables & other details that give the house character & depth."*
- *"The first 3 looked very generic and lacking in character. All were*

relatively short on the trees and shrubs found in Arlington."

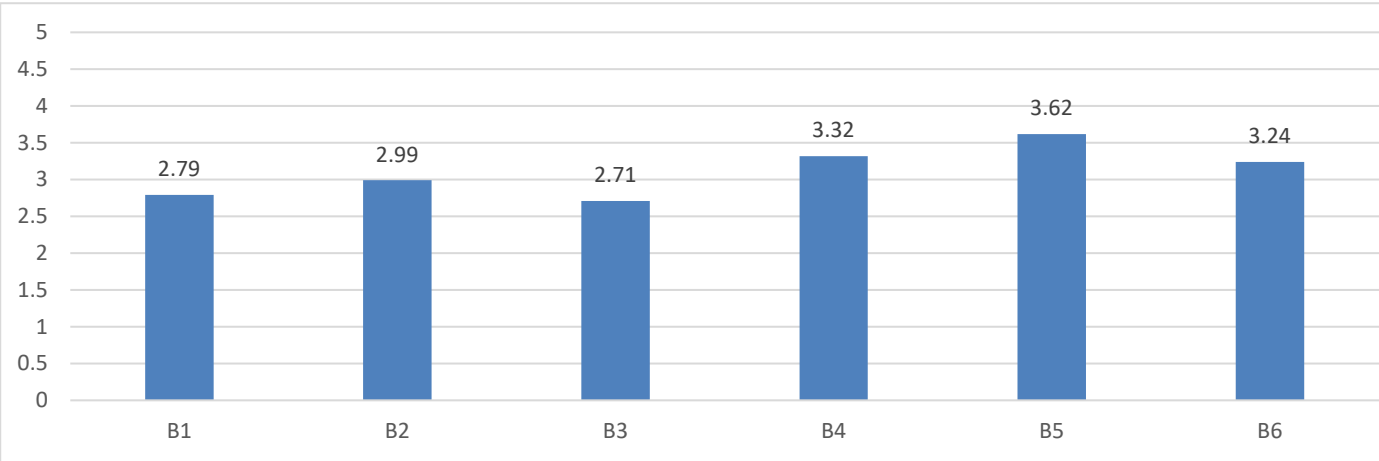
- *"Don't like the garage right on the street (A2); lot grading A-1 is disruptive; like the way A5 fits in with the neighborhood"*
- *"A1 is just blah. A2 is interesting but too big for it's neighbor. A3 is just ugly. A4 is wonderful. A5 is wonderful but does look a little more Cambridge than Arlington."*
- *"A-2 is an abomination with no outward features of interest or community facing qualities. It looks like a fortress designed to keep everyone else at bay."*
- *"The two that I felt were highly desirable have combine a traditional look with modern materials. The first two had a boxy look that felt too imposing."*
- *"Property designs that emphasize porches and gardens that face the street are much more neighborly and inviting than garages. There are creative ways to accommodate cars without centering vehicles in the street-facing design."*
- *"A-2 and A-3 are too large for the context. I'd rather see homes with smaller footprints for single-family use. Lot A-3 would be better suited to a two or three family*

residence. A-1 has little street appeal, but fits the neighborhood. A-2 is visually unappealing. A-4 has street appeal but still lacks windows on the sides of the house. A-5 is a large single family but looks appropriate in context. It is attractive."

- *"These examples are not a graceful as I would like. They are clearly maximizing size or minimizing cost and only some strive for architectural value."*
- *"A-2 and A-3 typify "mcmansion" style houses with bizarre layouts, nonsensical rooflines, and external features like window size and placement placed seemingly at random to accommodate strange internal features"*

Two-Family House (B1 - B6) - Preference Results

Survey participants ranked images of two-family houses from Highly Undesirable (1), Undesirable (2), Neutral (3), Desirable (4), and Highly Desirable (5). A rating for each image was calculated and is displayed in the following graph.



305 respondents shared additional thoughts about two-family houses in Arlington and some of the reasoning for their ranking.

Emergent themes from the responses include:

- Preference for traditional "stacked" two-family buildings (B5) rather than side-by-side townhouses (B1, B2, B3).
- Concern about dominating garages, lack of front yards, and bulky, bland design.
- The feedback was overall less positive for all of these chosen examples, relative to the rest of the survey.

Example quotes have been compiled to illustrate a variety of viewpoints:

- *"All of the above are visually fine, some more interesting than others, but no issues. The only ones that would work for me as an older person are those where I could get a first floor unit on one floor."*
- *"Density is good! These buildings do not look out of place."*
- *"B3 has an awful lot of paved space and not much green grass/natural plantings, nor room for trees. They all look very tall to me - does everyone require a third floor to store all of their 'stuff' these days??"*

- *"The parking minimums and requirements present a huge problem for townhouses. I am strongly supportive of densifying Arlington, but want it done in a pedestrian friendly way."*
- *"A lot of modern townhouses force garages into the scheme in awkward ways. I prefer the traditional two-family over/under rather than the side by side, for Arlington."*
- *"The first several images are too big, come too close to the sidewalks, and overshadow everything else. I don't understand why we can't have more moderately-sized homes in new construction. The last image is the only one I prefer. It is of moderate size, its porch feels cozy and not intimidating and its style fits with the neighborhood."*
- *"I prefer options with porches. Some of these examples seemed very wide compared with what we have today. They seem like two separate homes that happen to be conjoined. I have a hard time seeing these fit well on our existing two-family lots, certainly not in East Arlington."*

Parking Strategies (C1 - C8) - Preference Results

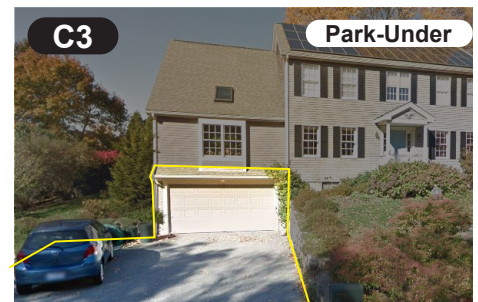
Survey participants ranked images of parking strategies from Highly Undesirable (1), Undesirable (2), Neutral (3), Desirable (4), and Highly Desirable (5). A rating for each image was calculated and is displayed in the following graph.



Google Streetview



Google Streetview



Google Streetview



MLS Property Information Network, Inc



Google Streetview



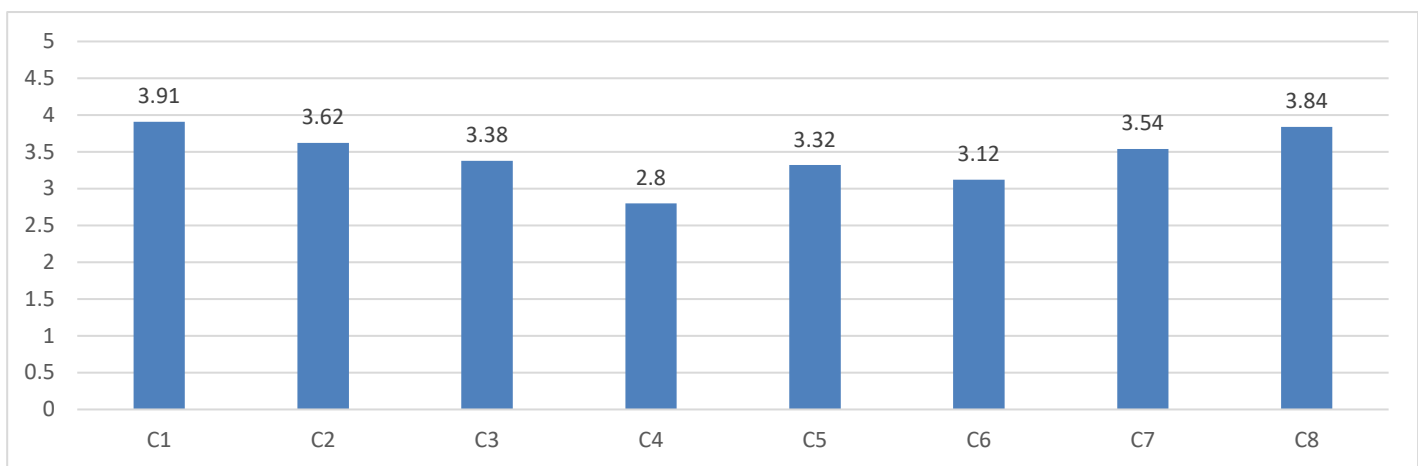
Google Streetview



Architect -Levy Art N Architecture; Ken Gutmaker Photography



Houzz



302 respondents shared additional thoughts about parking strategies in Arlington.

Emergent themes from the responses include:

- Desire to see reduction in paved surfaces and some flexibility in parking requirements.
- Desire to keep garage and parking not at the forefront of the house.
- Parking and garages should not increase the height of the house.

Example quotes have been compiled to illustrate a variety of viewpoints:

- *"Please find a way to reduce the impermeable surface. Many two families in particular have all yard*

space covered in asphalt. I would like to see new developments required to provide some green space both for aesthetics and climate resilience."

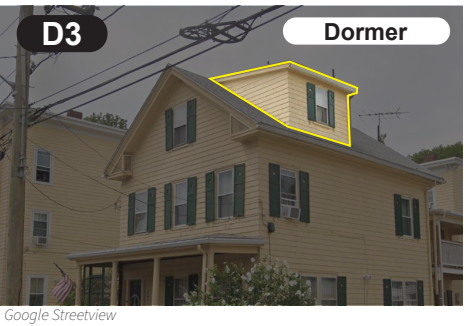
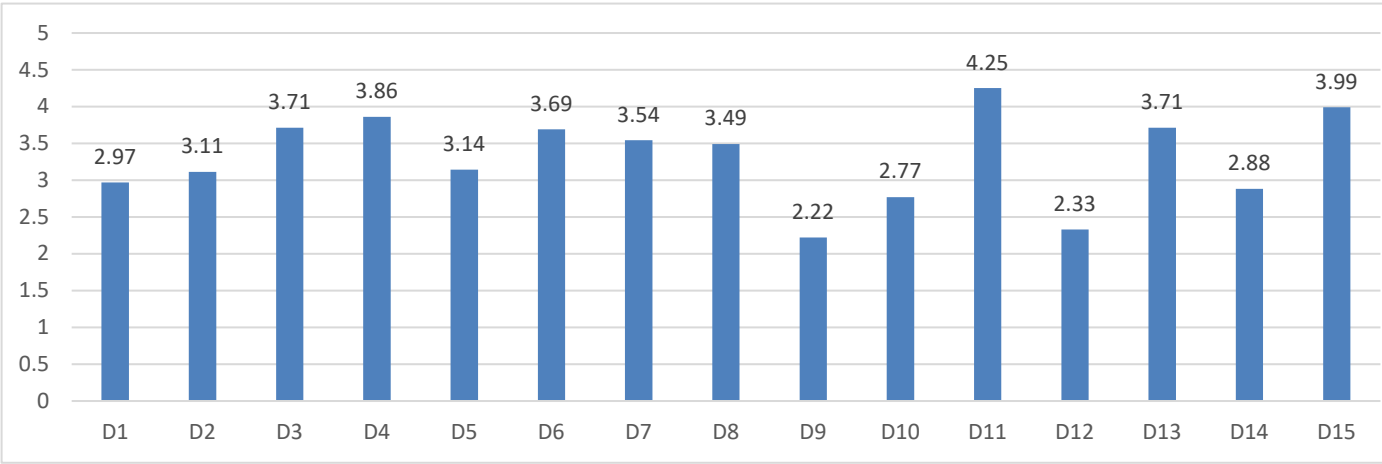
- *"Would prefer on street parking be available. Would enable increased density."*
- *"The garage should not be the most prominent feature of the house"*
- *"The steep grade of park-under garages is an undesirable eyesore and a parking hassle for the residents. If the lot is large enough for an alternative type of garage (ground-level, side, etc), the town should not allow for park-under garages simply so that developers*

can put an oversized home on the lot."

- *" These ground level, concealed garages will only work if they do not increase the height of the home. In that case, garages on the property itself are better."*
- *"Driveways and garages are best on the sides and back of houses."*
- *"All these parking strategies are mostly fine and are really dependent on the lot characteristics. Allow for flexibility in parking."*

Additions (D1 - D15) - Preference Results

Survey participants ranked images of additions from Highly Undesirable (1), Undesirable (2), Neutral (3), Desirable (4), and Highly Desirable (5). A rating for each image was calculated and is displayed in the following graph.





D4

Dormer

Google Streetview



D5

Enclosed Porch

Google Streetview



D6

Colonial Addition

Old House Online, Gordon Bock,



D7

Colonial Addition

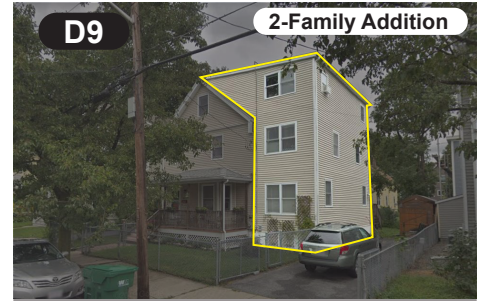
Old House Online, Gordon Bock,



D8

Colonial Addition

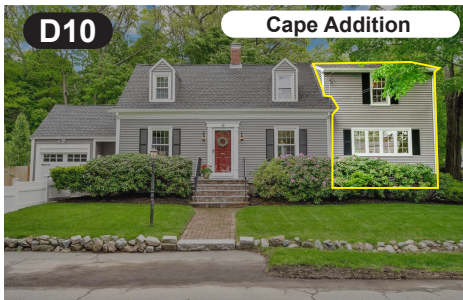
Old House Online, Gordon Bock,



D9

2-Family Addition

Google Streetview



D10

Cape Addition

Angela DiRusso of William Raveis R.E. & Home Services



D11

Cape Addition

Keith Robertson, Crismatec



D12

Bungalow Addition

Old House Journal, Additions 101



D13

Bungalow Addition

Old House Online, Gordon Bock



D14

Ranch Addition

Old House Journal, Additions 101



D15

Ranch Addition

Metzler Home Builders

237 respondents shared additional thoughts about additions and renovations in Arlington.

Emergent themes from the responses include:

- Ideal additions renovations (D4, D6, D11) look as if they were part of the original structure rather than an afterthought.
- Good additions use the same details and materials as the original house. They also are smaller than the original house.
- Guidelines for additions are important but should not overly restrict residents from updating their houses.
- Some respondents noted ADUs and opinions were divided.

Example quotes have been compiled to illustrate a variety of viewpoints:

- *"With the high cost of housing in Arlington, it's important to allow homeowners to make additions to their houses and not impose an arduous review process for most additions (less than 1,000 sf)."*
- *"Additions would need to consider scale, proportion to lot and surroundings - other homes, street, etc... Some of these additions are huge! I do not think Arlington lots can accommodate such additions."*
- *"Many additions are essentially new, larger houses attached to older, smaller houses. They are oversized and the original house is the size of what one would have considered an addition."*
- *"The ideal addition doesn't affect the facade as visible from the street."*
- *"Arlington is a special place to live in. With the rise in property prices, not just in town but in the metro west area, more and more residents are choosing to stay and renovate their existing homes. As a homeowner, I strongly feel that residents should have the flexibility to design their homes as per their needs. Restricting renovations due to aesthetics is not useful. There also needs to be equity in rules governing expansions. A single family homeowner with a large lot can get away with a lot more than a multi-family owner."*
- *"It is hard to describe what is good or bad but the addition must look like it could have been part of the original architectural design of the house to be aesthetically pleasing."*
- *"Best are the ones that incorporate the existing architectural features and blend in*

the additions. Some literally look like boxes stuck on the sides/top. Those are not as attractive."

5. Now that you've taken the visual preference survey, what do you hope the Residential Design Guidelines will accomplish?

Emergent themes from the 620 responses include a desire for the guidelines to:

- Encourage diversity in high-quality design.
- Encourage new houses that fit in with the neighborhood, particularly around scale and lot coverage.
- Promotes better designs without creating too many restrictions to new housing and renovations.

Example quotes have been compiled to illustrate a variety of viewpoints:

- *"Give some guidelines without being overly intrusive."*
- *"To preserve some of the character of Arlington residential neighborhoods."*
- *"I hope the guidelines will thoughtfully allow modernizing Arlington's neighborhoods for today's living needs."*
- *"Flexibility to allow homeowners to build or add space while not completely being out of scale with*

neighbors, and while maintaining a pedestrian-scale street environment and "neighborly" feel. Along those lines front porches/stoops should be required or highly encouraged."

- *"Keep Arlington from having too many ugly new houses, while allowing people to have more spacious, modernized, energy efficient homes."*

6. What concerns or reservations do you have about the Residential Design Guidelines?

Emergent themes from the 557 responses include concerns that the guidelines will:

- Be too strict and discourage any new development.
- Regulate taste, creating too much uniformity, or still allow oversized houses and lack enforcement.

Example quotes have been compiled to illustrate a variety of viewpoints:

- *"I am afraid if we make the guidelines appear very strict or arbitrary they will not be accepted, yet we need something*

to protect the integrity of the town architecture and greenspaces."

- *"Too much restriction on people's freedom and ability to choose how to renovate their homes."*
- *"They allow way to much density, not enough set backs and too small lots."*
- *"Too lenient to developers, so they use cheap materials; rip up existing green space and trees; create huge, out-of-scale housing; disregard surrounding properties (design, scale)."*

- *"I am concerned that individual taste in housing design may be stifled to meet a community norm."*

- *"How will they be made attractive to builders? If the trade-offs for adherence are allowing larger houses I'd be opposed."*

- *"Not everyone has the same aesthetic preferences which may make it harder for someone to renovate in a style they personally prefer."*

7. Finally, what questions do you have about the Residential Design Guidelines?

Emergent questions from the 309 responses include:

- Clarity around goals, timeline, and process for the guidelines.
- How the guidelines will be used and enforced.

Example quotes have been compiled to illustrate a variety of viewpoints:

- *"Does Arlington want to maintain or to achieve a unique style while staying affordable? Does Arlington encourage sustainable building practices? Do other communities send out surveys?"*
- *"How will guidelines impact what becomes regulation?"*
- *"What is the purpose of the guidelines? Who will be the final arbiter? Will they be used to unjustly prevent something from being built?"*
- *"If they are voluntary, how will they be enforced? Enforcement of Zoning Bylaws is already spotty."*
- *"Will these be guidelines or requirements, will exceptions be permitted and under what circumstances?"*
- *"Is this a binding initiative with public forums, or what is the next step for input into this process?"*

8. In addition, while the focus of the design guidelines will be on the design of the building itself, landscaping around the house is important as well. Do you have any thoughts about landscaping?

Emergent themes from the 517 responses include:

- Emphasis on the need for green space and tree cover while avoiding impermeable, paved yards.
- Avoid regulating or requiring a certain kind of landscaping and leave landscaping design decisions to homeowners.
- *"Landscaping can be tremendously costly, and is often beyond the reach of most already financially stressed community members. Be generously indulgent to homeowners with any guidelines."*
- *"It is important for houses to have yards with unpaved surfaces for rainwater management."*
- *"Landscaping can improve the visual look of a neighborhood. I think how one landscapes (if at all) should not be regulated."*
- *"I used to live in a neighborhood with a Homeowner's Association. They stifle creativity. Let's let people decide how they want to landscape for themselves."*
- *"Eco-friendly landscaping vs. generic grassy lawns would be great. Gardens and raised beds also enhance quality of life and food security. Consider edible plants and fruit-bearing trees over simply aesthetically 'pleasing' trees and shrubs."*

Example quotes have been compiled to illustrate a variety of viewpoints:

- *"Landscaping can improve the visual look of a neighborhood. I*

Summary of Findings

The survey collected varied perspectives about different perspectives on Arlington's residential neighborhoods.

Overall, respondents love Arlington because of its balance between urban convenience and the community feel of a quieter, smaller town. Respondents also appreciated the green open spaces and leafy feel of the residential streets. Finally, many celebrated Arlington's architectural history and diversity.

Many residents had concerns about recent developments. Some noted that new homes were too large and thus priced significantly higher, reducing the stock of relatively affordable homes. Many perceived that these new homes were built to their zoning maximum and did not provide adequate open space and setbacks from the street and abutting houses. Others criticized the "boxiness" and lack of architectural quality of new houses.

Specifically for single-family houses, the images with the highest ratings (A4, A5) were noted for their higher quality of architectural details and smaller presence on the street. Many noted that they wanted to see more space dedicated to green space in the front yard.

For two-family houses, the image with the highest rating (B5) looked closer to the common stacked two-family houses. Many respondents reacted less favorably to the duplex or townhouse options, noting that they were too high and dominated by the garage and driveway.

For parking strategies, the images with higher ratings tend to minimize the visual impact of the garage or driveway. These include rear garages (C1), side garages (C2), and the garage designed to blend in with the house (C8). The park-under that worked with the topography and did not include a steep downward slope (C3) was rated higher than the park-under duplex (C4).

For renovations, the images that showed additions that looked as if they were originally built as part of the house were the most successful (D4, D11). Over-sized additions and dormers were least successful (D9). Another example of a successful renovation completely transformed the original house while maintaining the same frontage, so the entire house felt cohesive as one (D15).

For the goals of the Design Guidelines, most respondents wanted a set of guidelines that would promote quality design that fits well in the neighborhood but would not overly restrict development,

constraining supply or stifling creativity.

Next Steps

Based on the survey results, the next step of the community process focus on gathering feedback on the specific tools that will be used to evaluate new homes and renovations. Differentiating between zoning, requirements, and guidelines will be key. The priority should be to demonstrate how these design tools, without changing the underlying zoning, can help to mitigate the perception of size of new homes. There should also be clarification of how these guidelines will be used and at what step of the building permitting process.